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THE CARE AND TESTING OF CAMEMBERT CHEESE.

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This article is intended to aid in establishing a more general understanding of the following points with reference to the Camembert type of cheese:

1. The proper appearance of ripe Camembert cheese.
2. The variations in flavor among really good cheeses, corresponding to the widely different tastes of consumers.
3. How to test a cheese to determine its degree of ripeness without cutting it.
4. How cheeses not fully ripe should be handled by dealer and consumer to get the best results.

THE CHEESE DESCRIBED.

Camembert cheeses are made in sizes $2\frac{1}{2}$ to $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter and $1\frac{1}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness. They are ripened by the agency of molds and bacteria which form a feltlike rind over their whole surface one-sixteenth to one-eighth of an inch in thickness. This rind may be dry and gray or grayish-green, consisting of a feltlike surface of mold on the outside, below which a harder portion consists of mold embedded in partially dried cheese, or the moldy part may be more or less completely overgrown or displaced by yellowish to reddish slime composed mainly of bacteria. Good cheeses may have either appearance.

Inside the rind the cheese is softened progressively toward the center from all sides, so that a fully ripe cheese has no hard, sour curd in the center, but is completely softened. No mold should be visible inside the rind, but the moldy rind itself is necessary because the ripening is caused by the ferments secreted by the mold into the cheese. As the curd ripens the changed portion assumes a slightly deeper color than the unripe curd as a result of chemical changes. Well-ripened cheeses vary from nearly a fluid texture to the consistency of moderately soft butter.

DIFFERENTLY FLAVORED CHEESES.

Different brands of Camembert vary greatly in flavor when at their best. These differences have led to widely divergent ideals or tastes among consumers, and as a result to some contention as to which is

real Camembert. Investigation shows that slight differences in handling will cause large differences in texture and flavor in the same lot of cheese, hence all are equally entitled to be called Camembert. It is also possible to group together distinguishing marks which will enable the purchaser to select by examination such cheeses as will satisfy his particular taste. In general, intensity of flavor increases with the softness of the cheese; consequently very soft cheeses are usually strong cheeses. The firmer ripening is commonly associated with the milder and more delicate flavors. In surface appearance a sticky, slimy, yellowish rind betrays a tendency to strong flavors, while the dryer surfaces are generally a fair index to milder flavor. Although these signs sometimes fail in examining rapidly ripened domestic cheese, attention to them will give a large average of satisfaction.

HOW TO TEST RIPENESS.

The common practice of removing the box cover and pushing the index finger into the exposed surface of the cheese is not the best way for even an experienced judge to select a good cheese. The appearance of the cheese and its feeling to the finger may be sufficient after long practice, but the careful purchaser will find it far better to turn the box over, tap it gently so that the cheese will fall upon the free hand, then placing the thumb upon one side and the fingers upon the other, test by gentle pressure and a very slight shearing motion (one hand moved slightly toward or away from the body while the other is held stationary). Very little experience will enable one to detect whether a mass of unripe curd remains in the center, how large this is, if any, and the degree of softness in the fully ripe portion as indicated by firmness or tendency to lose shape in the hands. If a strong ammoniacal odor is present it indicates overripeness.

Unless the condition of the cheese is guaranteed by a reliable salesman the purchaser should examine each cheese carefully before buying. The consumer who wants a cheese exactly right will be amply repaid for the extra trouble.

CARE OF CAMEMBERT CHEESE.

Camembert cheeses are packed and shipped from the factory when half ripe or even earlier. This is especially true of imported cheese. In any case, after the cheese is packed for shipment transfer should be prompt. Crates should not be exposed to heat, dampness, or dryness. If the weather is warm, refrigeration in transit becomes necessary. If cheese must be stored in the warm season, refrigeration is indispensable.

As the imported cheese reaches our markets its ripening may often be finished by six to twenty-four hours in a warm room. Crates of

such cheese should not therefore stand in rooms as warm as 60° F. It has been a common but very bad practice to empty whole crates of cheese without reference to condition or ripeness upon the counter for the purchasers to pick from until all are sold. The purchaser of course takes his own risk, and usually gets a poor cheese. Such handling greatly hinders the trade in soft cheese.

To put trade upon a proper basis the condition of the cheese should be determined as soon as it is received. If already ripe, or nearly so, the whole lot belongs in the ice box. If still solid, the main stock should be kept in a cool cellar, 55° or below, and enough cheeses kept ripening in a warmer room to supply the trade from day to day. If the dealers would give the cheese the necessary care, based upon knowledge of its exact condition, as is the practice in the best hotels and restaurants, the percentage of satisfaction would be greatly increased. A cheese should not be offered for sale until it is fit to eat, and once sold it should be promptly served while in the best condition. Both dealer and consumer need therefore to base their treatment of Camembert cheese upon the same thoughtful care already given to other very perishable products.

The practice of the hotels and restaurants which serve this cheese regularly in perfect condition is comparatively simple. The cheeses are bought in quantity, and the condition of each consignment is promptly ascertained. The stock is stored, according to its condition—in the cellar or the ice box. A cheese nearly ripe is brought out and merely warmed for a few hours. If harder, the time in the warm room and even the temperature of the room is correspondingly increased, with careful watching. By keeping in this way enough cheeses just right to provide for the regular or expected trade, both dissatisfaction and losses are reduced to a minimum. One hotel serving cheeses in quarters at 25 cents a portion reports losses of less than 10 per cent on cheeses bought by the crate. This is much less than can be hoped for under less careful management, and such methods merit the consideration of all who deal in any way with Camembert cheese.

CANNED CAMEMBERT.

Among the forms in which Camembert cheese reaches the market are several brands of canned cheese. These have been partly or completely sterilized by heat, and the tins so far as examined have proved to contain fairly good flavored cheese. This treatment alters the flavor to some degree, but when successful preserves the cheese against time and changes of climate, making it available at any place or time of year. These brands command a limited but continuous market among those who can afford the increased price and who do not object to the flavor of cooking.

LABELS.

Domestic Camembert is now required to bear the legend "Camembert type" or "Camembert style," and to have designated upon it the State in which it is made. Only imported cheese is labeled Camembert without such modifying term.

Practically all Camembert cheese is made from milk from which a very little of the fat is taken. Labels reading "cream" or "double" or "triple" cream mean nothing beyond good cheese. Each brand and almost each cheese needs to be judged separately.

CAUTIONS.

Keeping.—If a cheese is already fully ripe, it should not be kept several days before eating. If it can not be eaten promptly, however, its tendency to quick decay can be checked (not entirely stopped) by putting it on ice and holding it there until nearly time to serve. Flavor and texture are then restored by permitting the cheese to thaw out at room temperature before serving.

Smell.—The proper odor of Camembert cheese is easily distinguished from the odors of decay, which are distinctly different. This odor may not be agreeable, but when properly discriminated from really objectionable odors it is no more disagreeable than that of fish or onions. If the cheese is really bad the odor becomes distinctly putrefactive.

Dried-up cheese.—A Camembert cheese shrunken from the side of the box or much depressed in the center is probably overripe or dried up by careless handling. A dried-up, powdery appearance of the rind with brownish or blackish areas indicates overripeness.

Bad ripening.—A yellowish to reddish, slimy surface, irregularly ridged and wrinkled, often conceals about one-fourth of an inch of liquefied, strong-flavored cheese over a hard, sour center, which refuses to ripen. This must not be confused with the smoother, reddish, slimy surface with faint parallel ridges, found upon certain excellent brands of cheese. Reddish, slimy cheeses should be carefully examined before buying.

Tin foil or paper wrapping.—Cheeses wrapped in tin foil incline to become soft and strong flavored; those wrapped in paper incline to the firmer textures and milder flavors. Cheeses wrapped in paper dry out so quickly when exposed that they must be watched more carefully than the others. They often become hard and gummy when old, hence are very deceptive.

Overripeness.—In addition to the marks already noted, overripe cheese always has a peculiarly sharp flavor readily recognized after eating once. Such a cheese showing no sour curd in the center is

often gummy or tallowy in texture and shows at times watery lines of cleavage between gummy masses.

Bargain Camembert.—Bargain-counter Camembert should be avoided unless the buyer is sure of his judgment as to the condition of the cheese. Cheeses sold at much reduction are almost sure to be either already unsalable at regular prices or so nearly so as to be very questionable. Some, however, enjoy cheese in various stages of overripeness, and such persons may safely buy the marked-down cheeses.

It should be remembered that there are few cheeses so good as good Camembert and few so bad as bad Camembert.

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